



The Blawenburg Beacon

December 2009

A newsletter for the members and friends
of The Blawenburg Reformed Church

Peace Be With You

Some of you might know I was out of town for three days during the week of December 1st. On the 2nd (Tuesday) I flew down to Florida for the sole purpose of driving my parents' car north to New Jersey. (As my father's health continues to decline, it became increasingly obvious to them that the time had come to move closer to the family.) Only one thing made the flight memorable. In all three airports I visited that day (Philadelphia, Atlanta and West Palm) a mono-toned voice delivered a pre-recorded message ad infinitum: "The Department of Homeland Security has declared the terrorist threat level Code Orange, meaning we are on heightened alert for terrorist activity. Please report immediately unattended baggage or suspicious behavior to any uniformed airport security guard."

Even the most unflappable personality will experience a little jolt when reminded of this cold reality - especially before climbing aboard a jet airliner. Because of the way this decade began how many of us still feel a sense of unease in crowded places during the holiday season?

Of course, nothing happened.

On Wednesday morning, the 3rd, as my parents awaited the airport shuttle, I packed their winter clothes and other essentials into their Dodge Stratus and pulled out of the driveway at 8 a.m. to begin the 1200 mile trek to New Jersey. The weather forecast for states north of Florida was not promising, so I pushed the speed limit and stopped only for gas. Birds and blue filled the skies of the Sunshine State, but dark clouds rumbled in once I crossed into Georgia. Just outside Savannah on Route 95 a special news bulletin broke into a particularly enjoyable "non-stop" set of classic rock to announce that local schools were closing at 2 p.m. in anticipation of severe weather due in the area by about 3. The dashboard clock read 1:45, giving me an hour and fifteen minutes to put as many miles as possible between me and Savannah. Suddenly, memories of my encounter with Hurricane Frances over five years before flooded my thoughts. Would I make it to my first night's destination, or would a funnel cloud whisk me away to munchkin land?

Of course nothing happened - to me, anyway. While several areas got smacked by severe thunderstorms and high winds (NJ included), I slept soundly through it all in a Super 8 Motel room in Lumberton, North Carolina. The news reported no fatalities or serious injuries.

On Friday the 4th, my first morning back in the office, Nancy told me that the Mercer County Health Department was advising all churches to suspend passing the hand of peace during services due to the swine flu threat. We, as well as all churches of which I am aware, have elected not to follow this advice.

And guess what? Nothing thus far has happened.

We might get the flu eventually. Who knows? But short of wearing rubber gloves and surgical masks out in public - or avoiding the public altogether - what exactly can we do about it? Whether we take dramatic precautions or just live our lives as we always have, the chances are pretty much the same that we will get the flu, or be victims of terrorism or a severe storm. Very slim. Of course, we should keep our eyes open and not take unnecessary chances, but besides that what's the point of stressing about any of these things?

When the angels appeared to the shepherds in the field on that strange, wonderful night over two thousand years ago, their departing message revealed God's will for the world a message that rings true every year, especially at this time, "Peace on earth! And good will to all people." While the Apostle Paul awaited his execution by the Romans, he wrote to his friends in Philippi, "Rejoice in the Lord always . . . and the God of peace and love will be with you." When our Lord Jesus appeared to the disciples in the upper room after that terrible weekend when they thought their lives had ended, his first words were, "Peace be with you."

Let this be the year we actually pay heed to the words of our Lord, Paul and the heavenly host. Let us commit to peace in our own hearts and with other people, and trust the fact that God will always take care of us.

Have a blessed Christmas!

Peace, Pastor Rich

Coming in January, chapter 1 of a serialized short story "The Ghost Next Door" by Pastor Rich (based on true reports).

Cash for Gold

In March we had a small success with people selling their gold and the church receiving a percentage from the gold buyer. The Gold Buyer will be back in Cook Hall on the morning of Dec. 16th. Feel free to stop in or leave your gold in the church office in a labeled bag.

BRC Women
In the Memorial Hall Theater

January 14th @ 7:00 PM
Arbonne Spa Night

February 11th @ 7:00 PM
E-Bay 101

"A Community Christmas Celebration" Missions ...
December 20

This holiday season promises to be one of the most exciting in recent memory, because this year we will be joining with the Reformed Churches of Griggstown, Harlingen and Rocky Hill for the first annual "Community Christmas Celebration" to be held this year at the Harlingen Reformed Church on Sunday evening December 20 at 7 p.m.

While we have not firmed up all of the details, the service will include a congregation-wide carol sing, selections from a combined choir, a musical selection from each congregation, instrumental music, soloists and perhaps a brief meditation from one or more of the pastors.

The entire Montgomery/Rocky Hill community will be invited to attend the service, which will be followed by light refreshments and fellowship.

Joint choir rehearsals will be held at Harlingen on December 10 and 17, but we will begin our own rehearsals later this month.

The "Celebration" is another of the ongoing efforts of our four neighboring Reformed Churches to promote our denominational identity and solidify our unity through worship and fellowship.

Please circle your calendars now.

THANKSGIVING FOOD BASKETS:
We donated two full Thanksgiving food baskets to the Montgomery Food Pantry. They had requested 34 originally and ShopRite received at least 45 donations of free turkeys/hams to go with these. Thank you!

OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD SHOEBOX COLLECTION

Thank you to those who contributed and packed shoeboxes for us. We delivered 22 boxes from BRC and 22 more from BVS and contributed a total of \$308 to cover the shipping for all 44 for Samaritan's Purse. They will add a child-appropriate Gospel message to each and you will bring joy to some child this Christmas!

ONGOING MISSIONS

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Kits for CWS Baby, Student and Health

Barb A and Bernice were busy this summer providing us with blankets, sweaters and school bags. On the mission table in Cook Hall are lists of needed items for you to keep on hand as you see sales. We have lots of notebooks now. The biggest ticket item we need is cloth diapers. If you see them on sale ever, please pick them up for us. We will gladly reimburse you. We will plan to pack these kits in the spring with the Sunday School children.

Non-Perishable Food and Toiletry Items for our Township food pantry are collected in the Sanctuary and Cook Hall.

ONGOING MISSIONS

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Family Life Pot Luck Lunches

The Family Life Committee will once again host our Pot Luck Lunches after church. Here are the following dates in case you want to put them on your calendar now.

January 10th

February 7

March 7

Outreach Lunches

I have been having so much fun serving lunch on Tuesdays and getting to know the regulars and meeting new people. When there is a school holiday we have young servers who enjoy the tip money they receive. And we have been able to send \$200 to the preservation fund as well as pay chef Aubrey for his time.

Stop in any Tuesday (closed 12/22) from 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM.
We always have soup, a hot and a cold entrée and a dessert.

And there is always good company!

BVS and BRC Fund Raiser

The Preschool and Church are having a fund raiser by selling gift certificates to Blawenburg stores. They make a great gift or keep them for yourself. (See page 7 for the order form.)

Missions: Can you join us in serving those in need?

HEIFER INTERNATIONAL: This will be our mission focus for Advent and Christmas again this year. We have proudly raised over \$5,000 for an Ark each of the last our first two years and last year came close, even with the downturn in the economy. This year we will try once again for an Ark. Heifer alleviates hunger, poverty and environmental degradation through gifts of livestock and training. These animals provide food, draft power and generate income for families. Since 1944, Heifer has helped more than 4.5 million families in 125 countries (including the U.S.) become self-reliant. Each family “passes on the gift” by giving one or more of its animal’s offspring to another family in need, and they also, and so on. It is the ‘gift that keeps on giving’!

In Cook Hall, you will see options for purchasing a gift of different animals: cows (\$500), sheep/pigs/goats (\$120), llamas (\$150), water buffalo (\$250), ducks/geese/chickens (\$20), trio of rabbits (\$60), and honeybees (\$30). If you would like to do this in honor or memory of someone, there will be gift cards for you to take and use for this purpose. It is the perfect gift! (If you can’t get to Cook Hall, you may leave a check in the basket on the back table of the sanctuary where there is a price list for the different animals. Please make checks payable to BRC, noting “Heifer” (and the animal) on the ‘memo’ line and we will get the handsome honor/gift card to you to give to a loved one.



Whether we give enough for an ‘Ark’, changing the world two by two, or not, we can be assured that these are truly Christmas (or Birthday, etc.) **gifts that will “keep on giving”!** To learn more about Heifer, visit <http://www.heifer.org>

The Heifer Gift Ark offers hope worldwide to families who are poor and hungry. You'll help families start on a journey to fulfill a seemingly impossible dream - to secure food and a source of dependable income.

Each family who receives livestock will pass on one or more of the animal's offspring to other families who are in need in their community. Every gift will multiply for years to come.

Imagine how your gift could change the world. Two cows bring milk and income to a Russian village. Two sheep help families in Arizona produce wool. Two camels

help families in Tanzania earn income by transporting agricultural and industrial materials. Two oxen pull plows and carts in Uganda. Two water buffalo help Cambodian families increase rice production through animal draft power. And that's just the first five sets of animals ... your ark provides 15 pairs of animals to change lives. **What a wonderful way to bring joy to the world!**

Gift Ark:
Changing the World Two By Two

Croatia Update

Wind still blows in former communist world

By Rev. Eric J. Titus

I was in Berlin in 1983 when the wall was still standing firm and tall, and there was little hope that that immovable obstacle to freedom would ever be toppled. Now, I am looking back 20 years to when I was 26 and sat spellbound and wonderstruck at the images coming through the television of that wall coming down.

Among the images that stand out from that momentous time is the music video of “Wind of Change,” by the Scorpions, played over and over on MTV back when it was still dedicated to actually playing music videos. To see it, you can go to the following link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=taVW8Kv2HcQ>. It was played across Europe constantly, Croatia included, during this euphoric period of the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Part of the lyrics are: “Take me to the magic of the moment/ On a glory night/ Where the children of tomorrow dream away/ In the wind of change.”

Those children of tomorrow are now 20 years older, and I am sure that the hopes and dreams of many became dusty disappointments in the wake of the fall of communism. What could compare with that? This dream of many was shared with the entire world. But then came the hard reality of recovery and the work of reconciliation in the wake of the triumph of long resistance. Today this reconciliation and coming to terms with all that happened in “the dark corners” for 40 years still goes on.

The Scorpions sang hopefully: “Walking down the street/ Distant memories/ Are buried in the past forever.” But a good deal of the difficulty with the “children of tomorrow” is that memories aren’t really buried in the past forever. They are buried at the surface, and for many they still cause deep pain.

I read in the Nov. 11 *Prague Post* that the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes continues to delve into the “dark past.” The July 15 issue reported that a furor was caused in Prague by Stanislav Penc (a former dissident) who posted on the internet the names of those who had served or cooperated with the *Státní bezpečnost* (Secret Police) under communism.

Many want justice; others think it is better to bury memories in the past. It is an issue that is not easy and is fraught with complexities at many levels. The children of tomorrow have shared their dream, but the reality is many are still dealing with the nightmares of yesterday.

Croatia was a part of all this wind of change. Its situation became all the more difficult as war came on the heels of the great fall. The dream had hardly time to seed before the children of tomorrow became casualties and fatalities of war. The wind of change, as the Scorpions said it, “blows straight into the face of time.”

While the rest of the communist world moved forward, the war placed the former countries of Yugoslavia farther away from the wind of change and much of their shining moment was lost to this tragedy. The wind of change blows in Croatia, and even in our small city of Osijek things are always being done to better realize the promise of that magic moment of 20 years ago. But often disappointment and disillusionment threaten the dream.

Still the Croatian children of tomorrow do dream. They struggle to rebuild, to reconcile, to make sure the “magic of that moment” is nurtured and is able to grow and flourish, to make sure that the future matches the dream of that moment.

To be sure there are still walls that must come down. This is a universal truth. We are honored that we have been able to walk along side some of those children of tomorrow as they come to terms with that magic moment 20 years ago that still reaches in complex ways into today and the foreseeable future.

Eric and Nancy Titus are RCA missionaries in Osijek, Croatia, where they work at the Evangelical Theological Seminary and with the Reformed Christian Church in Croatia. They have three children: Samuel, 15, Valerie, 11, and Penny, 9.

A Bit of Blawenburg

*A Fund Raiser Benefiting
The Blawenburg Reformed Church &
The Blawenburg Village School*

***Pre-Order \$10 Gift Certificates for the
Following Blawenburg Establishments***

Adams Sandwiches []

Blawenburg Market []

Klean King Dry Cleaner []

Ma Coupe Hair Salon []

New World Pizza []

Total Gift Certificates x \$10 [] = []

Order by Dec. 11th and Receive by Dec. 18th

Make checks payable to Blawenburg Reformed Church

Name:

Phone:

The Blawenburg Beacon

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Dated Material

The Blawenburg Reformed Church is a covenant community of God's people united in Christ through the Holy Spirit. We commit our gifts to worship, hospitality, life-long learning, serving those in need, and proclaiming the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.